

# THE HISTORICAL CONNECTION



A newsletter of the city of Las Vegas Planning and Development Department.

The Historic Preservation Commission is dedicated to saving the city's legacy and heritage.

## City Updates its Historic Preservation Plan

*by Courtney Mooney, historic preservation officer*

The Las Vegas City Council adopted the Historic Properties Preservation Plan Element at its September 5, 2007 meeting. This element, part of the Las Vegas 2020 Master Plan, guides the city's historic preservation efforts with standards, goals, objectives and policies. The city has many buildings, objects, districts and sites that have historic, archaeological, cultural and/or architectural significance. It is a city priority to preserve these resources as a "living" part of the community, not just in text and photographs.

The original Historic Preservation Element was adopted as part of the city of Las Vegas' General Plan on April 1, 1992. Since that time, no amendments have been made to it, while many new concepts regarding the broadened role of historic preservation in the city have arisen.

The planning process for the update was guided by a task force formed to identify where improvements were needed in the 1992 plan, establish goals and objectives and address applicable standards. The task force was comprised of two essential groups, a technical advisory committee of historic preservation professionals and a city staff committee representing multiple departments.

The plan now includes:

- Integration with the city's Las Vegas 2020 Master Plan.
- The city's current inventory of historic buildings, sites and districts with added consideration for historic signs.
- Discussion of new issues in historic preservation, including historic building codes, Smart Growth and sustainability, cultural heritage tourism, the federal environmental review process and the preservation of resources from the recent past.

The Historic Properties Preservation Plan Element may be viewed on the city's Web site at [www.las-vegasnevada.gov/hpc](http://www.las-vegasnevada.gov/hpc) or may be purchased at the Development Services Center located at 731 S. Fourth Street, Las Vegas, NV 89101.



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# National Historic Preservation Month

## Preservation News



Mayor Oscar B. Goodman and HPC Chairman Bob Stoldal presented Historic Preservation Awards to the Junior League of Las Vegas, the Neon Museum Board of Trustees and the State Historic Preservation Office."

May 2007 was National Historic Preservation Month with the theme of "Making Preservation Work." The city of Las Vegas and its Historic Preservation Commission celebrated the special month with activities and events.

Mayor Oscar B. Goodman and the City

Council proclaimed May as National Historic Preservation Month at the May 16, City Council meeting. Immediately following the proclamation, Mayor Goodman and Historic Preservation Commission Chairman Bob Stoldal presented the 2007 Historic Preservation Awards.

The awards were presented to the Neon Museum Board of Trustees for its efforts to preserve the La Concha motel lobby and historic neon signs, the Junior League of Las Vegas for the preservation of the Morelli House and the State Historic Preservation Program for the Site Stewardship Program.

On Saturday, May 19, 2007, the Historic Preservation Commission participated in the Cultural Fair at the Old Mormon Fort as part of the Helldorado Days celebration.

The day was capped with the Helldorado Parade. Many city departments were also represented, including the Planning & Development Department's "Planning Pooches." Organizations and groups are encouraged to enter so start thinking of an entry for next year!

## Las Vegas Named a "Preserve America" Community



The city of Las Vegas has been designated a Preserve America Community. Preserve America is a White House initiative established in 2003 by presidential executive order in cooperation with

the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) and the U.S. Departments of the Interior, Commerce, Agriculture and Housing and Urban Development. The Las Vegas City Council adopted resolution R-49-2007 in support of the application in June 2007.

The benefits of becoming a Preserve America Community include White House recognition and eligibility for Preserve America grants. The city will be applying for these grant funds to develop a marketing program for the Post Modern museum at the historic U.S. Post Office and Federal Courthouse located on Stewart Avenue.

Other benefits gained from the designation are a Preserve America Community road sign, authorization to use the logo on signs, flags, banners, and other promotional materials, listing on a Preserve America Community directory, inclusion in national and regional press releases, and official notification to state tourism offices and visitors bureaus.

For more information about Preserve America visit:

**[www.preserveamerica.gov](http://www.preserveamerica.gov)**

## La Concha Motel Lobby Added to Las Vegas Historic Property Register



The Las Vegas City Council designated the famed La Concha motel lobby to the city's Historic

Property Register at its meeting on Wednesday, August 1, 2007. Originally constructed on the Las Vegas Strip in 1961, it was moved to the Neon Boneyard located at 770 Las Vegas Boulevard North in 2006 for its use as the museum lobby and visitor center at the future Neon Boneyard Park.

The La Concha lobby is an excellent example of the "Googie" architectural style that became popular in the late 1950's when modernism moved from its sharp 90 degree angles into expressive, free form designs. It was designed by internationally known African-American architect Paul R. Williams (1894-1980). He also designed the Berkley Square homes in 1954 in west Las Vegas, which is being nominated to the National Historic Register. Most of William's work was in southern California including the Shrine Auditorium, the Hollywood YMCA, the Los Angeles County Courthouse and the Beverly Hills Hotel.



## Preservation Update

Mayor Oscar B. Goodman presents Junior League past president Kellie Guild a plaque honoring the organization's efforts to relocate and restore the Morelli House.

### Morelli House Recognized for its Architectural Importance

The Morelli House, built in 1959, is officially part of the city's historic property register. The Las Vegas City Council approved this designation by ordinance on March 9, 2007, recognizing the building for its importance to the architectural and cultural history of the city. Although it has been removed from its original setting, it retains a high degree of integrity of design, materials, workmanship and even association.

The Morelli House was moved to its permanent location in 2001. It serves as offices, a history museum and gallery operated by the Junior League of Las Vegas. It was officially opened on April 9, 2007 and Mayor Oscar B. Goodman presented then president of Junior League of Las Vegas, Kellie Guild, with a plaque commending its efforts to preserve the house.

"Placing the Morelli House on the city's historic register recognizes and honors the historic architectural and cultural significance it so justly deserves," said Margo Wheeler, director of the Planning & Development Department. "The city is fortunate that this superb structure now sits within our boundaries and will be appreciated by generations of Las Vegas and visitors today and in the future."

The house was designed by Morelli and the Sands carpenter foreman Richard Small, with the help of local architect Hugh E. Taylor. The building was ultra-modern for its day and doesn't fit exclusively into one specific architectural classification of the period. Strikingly stylized, it can best be described as Modern style. Workers on its construction confirmed that the design was directly influenced by the works of R.M. Schindler and Philip Johnson, architect of the acclaimed Glass House in New Canaan, Connecticut, which was Mrs. Morelli's hometown.

The Desert Inn Estates, developed in 1952, was the first country club community built in the area and the first to employ modern design. Morelli was the orchestra conductor and musical director at the Sands during the Rat Pack's heyday and it has been reported that Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr. and a host of performers worked through their arrangements at the house. Morelli organized the community's first pops concerts in the 1960s and established the Antonio Morelli Friends of Music scholarship in 1969 for University of Nevada, Las Vegas music students.

## Upcoming Events

OCTOBER 2007

### National Trust Conference

October 2-6, 2007  
St. Paul, Minnesota

### Westside School Volunteer Painting Party

October 20, 2007 10:00 am  
"After-painting" party  
5 p.m., parking lot  
330 W. Washington Avenue  
(Washington and D)  
For more information, contact  
Principium Organization at  
[www.theprincipium.org](http://www.theprincipium.org)  
or email  
[info@theprincipium.org](mailto:info@theprincipium.org)

APRIL 2008

### American Planning Association National Conference

Las Vegas, Nevada  
April 27 - May 1, 2008

MAY 2008

### National Historic Preservation Month

This project is funded in part by a  
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May 2008



## Biography Corner: Greg Seymour

Local archaeologist, Greg Seymour, will have a hand in helping shape the city's historic preservation efforts. Las Vegas Mayor Oscar B. Goodman's recommendation to appoint him to the Historic Preservation Commission was approved at the June 20, 2007 city council meeting.

"The Historic Preservation Commission wished to add archaeological expertise to the board and Greg Seymour's credentials fit the bill perfectly," Mayor Goodman said. "Mr. Seymour's experience

and knowledge will be a valuable contribution to the commission when considering the city's archaeological and historic resources."

Seymour has more than 25 years of archaeological and historic preservation experience in the Great Basin and southwest regions of the United States. He received his master's degree in Anthropology from UNLV with an emphasis in the prehistoric ceramics of southern Nevada.

"The addition of Greg Seymour to our board truly rounds out the scope of its expertise," said Robert Stoldal, chairman of the Historic Preservation Commission. "We are most fortunate to have his expertise so readily available to us during discussions and deliberations."

# Gone But Not Forgotten:

Worswick, an architect newly arrived from San Francisco who dominated Las Vegas building design for the next two decades. Worswick designed the two-story house in the Mission Revival style, reflecting his California experience.

The house was described by art historian and former member of the Historic Preservation Commission Dr. Cathie Kelly as “one of the most classic examples of Mission Revival residential architecture in Las Vegas. The upper story of the house is opened by a loggia carried on simple thick piers and a cantilevered wooden balcony. The multiple layers of the façade and the overhanging eaves of the tiled roofs produce strong contrasts of light and dark.”

Stephen R. Whitehead moved from St. George, Utah to Overton, Nevada in 1905, where he and his wife established the Whitehead Mercantile Company. He became the newly created Clark County’s assessor in 1910, and moved his family to Las Vegas for the duration of his four-year term. They returned to Overton but came back to Las Vegas for good in 1922, when he was appointed county recorder and auditor (1922-1930.)

The family’s most notable resident of the house was daughter Betty, the youngest of his eight children and born in 1924. She became famous, albeit belatedly, as Betty Willis, the designer of the iconic “Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas” sign that greets visitors on the south end of Las Vegas Boulevard.

Whitehead left office in 1930 and managed his Roosevelt Title Insurance Company for the next decade. In 1942, he went to work for Basic Magnesium, but died shortly after. A year later, son-in-law Berkeley Bunker sold the home on behalf of the family to the Sisters of the Holy Family, who used it as a convent residence for more than 40 years.

During the nun’s tenure a garage was added, then a second story built on to that, and in 1965 a two-story wing was constructed. Several of the large bedrooms were subdivided to accommodate the growing number of nuns in residence. All of these additions were done with great care so as not to alter the architectural integrity of the structure. In 1983 the house was sold and the building became the offices of Consolidated Insurance Adjusters. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1987.

The story of the dream denied began in 1997, when the Whitehead House was about to be demolished. The Junior League stepped in and raised the funds to move it—in three sections. While seeking a suitable property for a permanent relocation site with funds from the Nevada Commission on Cultural Affairs, the house sat waiting for two years on a lot owned by the Gaughan family.

The wait was too long. In spite of the chain link fence surrounding it, vagrants intruded and set it on fire in July 2000. The fire damaged the building beyond repair. But fate closed the door and opened a window, as about that time the Morelli House became available. The Junior League embarked on a different but ultimately very rewarding path, saving not the classic Mission Revival mansion but the Morelli House, a unique mid-Century modern structure that is now a treasure for the Las Vegas community to enjoy at its new location at Ninth St. and Bridger Ave.



## The S.R. Whitehead House

By Dorothy Wright, vice-chairperson, Historic Preservation Commission

The story of the Stephen R. Whitehead House is particularly tragic for Las Vegas historic preservationists; it was so close to being saved and restored. The Junior League of Las Vegas, under the leadership of Louise Helton, labored to acquire the beautiful and historically important building, find a parcel of land and relocate it, only to see their dream go up in smoke.

The house was built at a cost of \$15,000 in 1929, for County Assessor Stephen R. Whitehead and his family. It was the first major project for A. L.



The Historic Preservation Commission is an 11-member board made up of community members appointed by the Las Vegas City Council. The board is responsible for hearing and making recommendations regarding the designation of historic landmarks, properties and districts to the city's historic register; overseeing alterations and new construction of designated historic properties and making recommendations to the City Council. Meetings: 4th Wednesday of each month, 12:15 pm, 731 S. Fourth Street, Las Vegas, NV 89101 except in November and December which are typically held on the 3rd Wednesday of the month.

Bob Stoldal, chairperson  
Dorothy Wright, vice-chairperson  
Mary Hausch  
Patrick J. Klenk  
Robert Bellis  
Janet Ruth White  
Richard H. Cuppett  
James Veltman  
Raymond Aikens  
Claytee White  
Greg Seymour  
David Millman, ex-officio

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